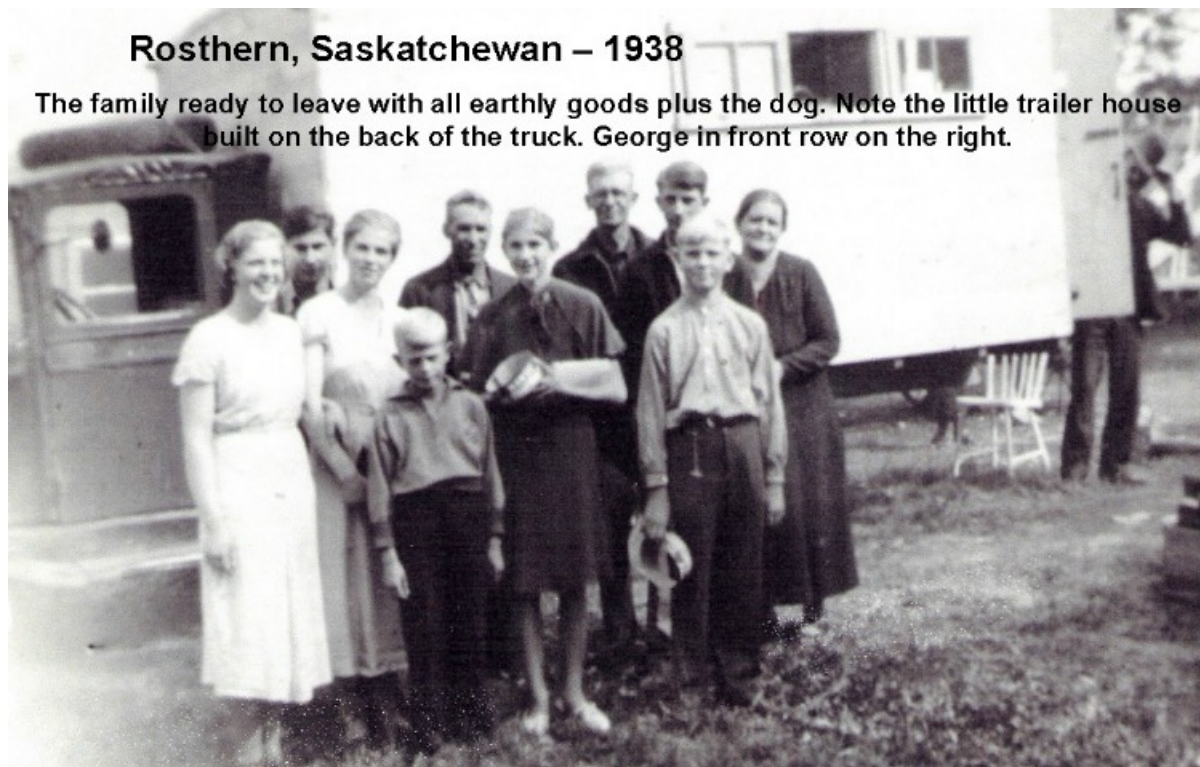


By Dan Friesen

As many of you know, Walking Adventures International (WAI) was founded by my father, George Friesen. Everyone has a story and every organization a tale to tell. Dad's story starts north of the border.



Dad was born a Canadian into a Mennonite family where Plattdeutsch (Low German) was the mother tongue. The kids later learned high German, the language in which church was conducted. His linguistic heritage was to play directly into the founding of Walking Adventures.

Migrating west from the prairie state of Saskatchewan, his family could have been the model for John Steinbach when he penned "The Grapes of Wrath". In 1938, during the grinding years of the Great Depression, they packed everything they owned onto the back of a pickup truck and headed for what they hoped was a better life in British Columbia.

Same house that was on the trailer as it is today

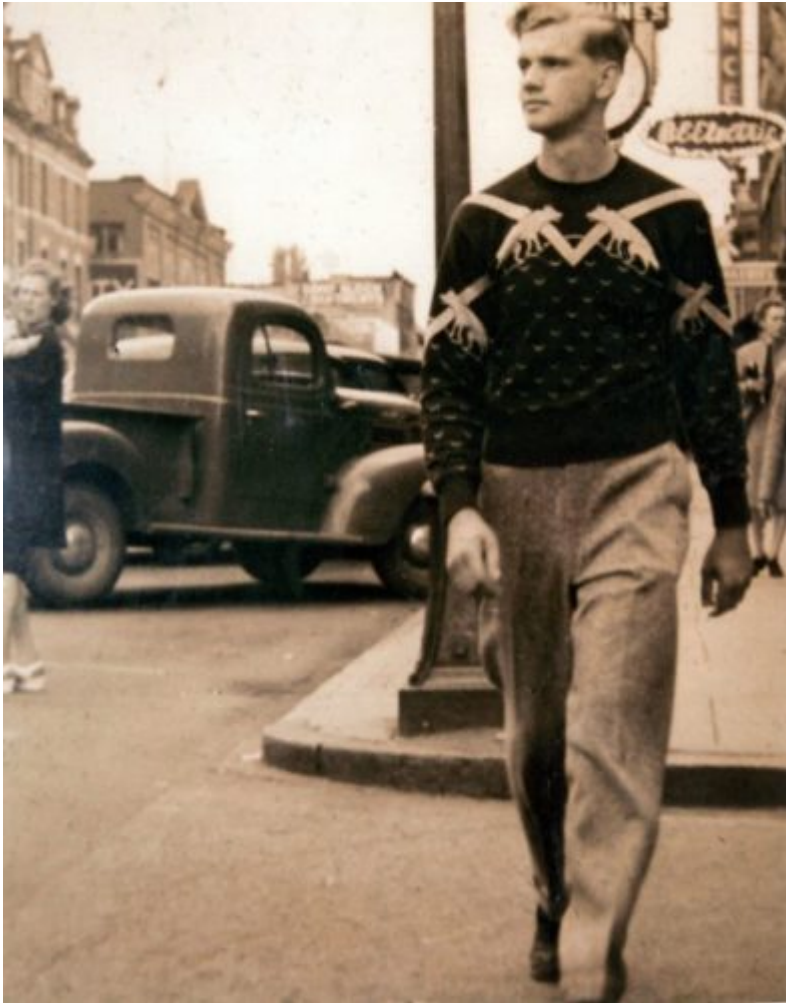
On the trip, it housed Grandma , 5 kids, furniture (including the organ), and the dog!



What waited was a treed plot of land that needed converting into a strawberry farm. Dad loved the challenge and considered every obstinate tree stump a personal affront to be dynamited and burned and strangled into submission with brute strength. That pretty much describes the tenacity with which my dad confronted problems.



Convinced, however, that the hard life of a farmer was not for him, he attended Bible school in Alberta, where he met my mom, and together they followed a call to enter mission work in still war-ravaged parts of Germany and Austria. Language ability was the primary cause for the decision and for dad's effectiveness. He was able to communicate like a native German-speaker throughout Central Europe.



Dad's GQ Shot!

After four years, they returned to North America where the medical needs of one of their kids brought them into the USA. Ultimately, language abilities again funneled dad in a direction; this time his German-speaking linguistics were converted into a teaching career at David Douglas High School in Portland, Oregon.



George & Gene in Hallein, Austria, with my older brother, Dave, and older sister, Ruthann

It was during this era that the seeds of WAI were borne. More on that in my next post.